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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 000593

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SUBJECT: S/I SATTERFIELD BRIEFS UAE FOREIGN MINISTER AND STATE SECURITY

REF: A) STATE 46951, B) KUWAIT 512, C) ABU DHABI 581

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (S) Special Advisor on Iraq David Satterfield held very productive meetings with UAE officials in Abu Dhabi May 7, an afternoon session with Director of Research and Analysis at State Security Directorate (SSD) Brigadier General Hamad al-Shamsi and an evening discussion with Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed (AbZ). Satterfield emphasized the need for the UAE, for its own sake, to have first hand information from -- and influence in -- Iraq. AbZ reiterated the UAEG's willingness to open its embassy and send an Ambassador at least part time, pending better coordination with the GoI. He welcomed a visit from PM Maliki and hoped the GoI would propose dates. He saw Iraqi participation in GCC + 2 meetings as a hopeful step toward Iraq's regional integration.

¶2. (S) AbZ recounted reasons for UAE skepticism of the GoI's ties to Iran, including a flap over an islands dispute between the UAE and Iran, Iran's "victorious mood" in Iraq, FM Mottaki's exaggerated statements about its role in the Arab League and GCC, ISCI comments about war compensation owed by Iraq to Iran, and President Talibani's travel to Teheran. He said our allies in the region were offended by being kept uninformed of U.S. intentions in its discussions with Iran, leading to a perception that we were cutting a deal behind their backs. He argued for more consultation with the GCC -- so that GCC states did not rely on Iran to fill them in on the details. AbZ said an Arab League ministerial meeting in Baghdad as early as June would be symbolically beneficial but faced some resistance (from the Arab Foreign Ministers themselves). He advised the USG to engage Maghreb states more vigorously and hoped that Saudi leaders were ready to take a more flexible view of the Iraqi leadership. Satterfield and the U.S. delegation reinforced the many reasons for a more robust UAE role in Iraq. AbZ noted that the UAE was limiting visas to Iraqis.

¶3. (S) SSD's al-Shamsi focused on the need for "joint efforts" to help Iraq and to combat Iran's influence. Satterfield said Iran was overplaying its hand, PM Maliki was showing more national leadership, and Iraqi security forces were displaying increased competence. With Iraqi leaders increasingly skeptical of Iran, it is time to force Iran to deal directly with the GoI rather than through surrogates. Engaging the Awakening movement enhances Sunni participation, the teams noted, and complements Maliki's evolution from a "one-dimensional" leader to a national figure. Al-Shamsi argued for a more unified front against Iran on a regional scale, in Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen. He reiterated UAEG support for our common fight against extremism. End summary.

Foreign Minister Abdullah (AbZ): Willing to engage with GoI

¶4. (S) Meeting the U.S. delegation alone, AbZ began with an inquiry about Kirkuk; Satterfield cited the helpful efforts of UN Special Representative Stephan de Mistura in defusing the "time bomb" of

Article 140 for the time being. Satterfield described the evolution of a GoI leadership functioning more as a state, recounting the common threat that many of Iraq's challenges pose for the rest of the region. The GoI needs support to face those challenges in ways beneficial to the region. AbZ expressed appreciation for Satterfield's visit as follow up to recent meetings in Manama and Kuwait (the first having bin "a bit more interesting" with some "quite remarkable" pictures presented). He understood that the delegation was in the region to ask Arabs to engage more deeply in Iraq. Satterfield said we were asking them to be more informed for their own sakes. AbZ assured his guests that the UAEG has a desire to assist, and would be sending a team "within a week or so" to investigate a possible embassy site in the International Zone. The UAE has been waiting nine months for GoI feedback on its request to open an Embassy, said AbZ, noting that his most recent contact on the issue was with FM Zebari. The UAE is ready to appoint an ambassador -- not initially resident full time in Baghdad but there "as much as possible" while easing into a sense of how to do the job safely. Satterfield invited any UAE advance party to Baghdad to meet with U.S. Embassy staff. Recounting Maliki's aborted attempt to visit the UAE (which fell through when the GoI offered dates only on a weekend -- when the UAE President does not see visitors), AbZ encouraged Maliki to propose new dates.

15. (S) As part of Iraq's integration into Arab circles, Maliki must be persuaded to deal more objectively with refugees in Jordan and Syria, not simply writing them off as having left Iraq voluntarily. Asked for his assessment of Iraqi participation in recent GCC plus 2 meetings in Bahrain, AbZ said that Iraq was headed toward regional integration but was not there yet. FM Zebari, for his part, engages well and is not seen as "the Kurdish Foreign Minister," he added, anticipating an increasing role for Iraq "because of that meeting and the way that Iraq is going to play in other upcoming meetings." He agreed that the

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window of opportunity to help Iraq integrate could be narrow if the opportunity is not seized effectively. The GoI "needs to see us as neighbors" and not as engaged solely with Sunni forces (although AbZ acknowledged UAEG "missteps" which may have created that perception within the GoI).

Be Skeptical of Iran's Influence

16. (S) AbZ, turning to Iran, recounted the UAE's consternation over the "incident in Irbil" in which First Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives Khalid al-Attiya orchestrated a statement supporting Iran's claims to three islands which the UAE also claims. It was the "worse moment you can think of" to go against the long-standing Arab consensus on the islands dispute, said AbZ, and "very, very" damaging, in effect "a self-inflicted wound." AbZ noted that a "memo" from the Iraqi MFA restating the GoI position in support of the UAE's claim had been received. Iran is off balance in Iraq and responding to circumstances it could not have anticipated, said Satterfield, stressing that now is the time for an Arab diplomatic presence.

17. (S) We should not talk about Iraq in the abstract, said AbZ, but in the context of Iran's ambitions. If Iran continues in its "victorious mood," GCC states might not have the stomach to remain in Iraq for long. AbZ questioned how the UAE could agree to debt relief when ISCI leader al-Hakim states that Iraq still owes Iran \$100 billion in war compensation. He said Iran is "feeling the heat" on financial sanctions -- not feeling it enough, "but hurting" nonetheless. He cited a "ridiculous bad joke" from Iranian FM Mottaki, who sat next to him at lunch in Kuwait recently, in which the latter reportedly made it clear that Iran would not tolerate further rhetoric on the islands dispute (with the UAE) since they (Iran) are members of the Arab League and the GCC. AbZ asked incredulously whether Mottaki really "thinks he is one of us."

Support for Arab Ministerial in Baghdad

18. (S) Satterfield again stressed the importance of an Arab/UAE presence in Baghdad to influence events and political dialogue. AbZ anticipated that in the next Arab League ministerial in Cairo there

could be some push for a "symbolic ministerial in Baghdad," preferably not at the airport nor in the International Zone -- but in a clearly Iraqi controlled location. President Talibani's residence or the MFA were discussed as possibilities. The idea would be to meet without an overnight stay. Asked what timing he had in mind, AbZ said "only a few of us" think early June would be feasible, but that idea was meeting some resistance. He said the concept would be addressed in Cairo the first week of June, would in theory involve the full Arab League at the ministerial level (although Saudi Arabia or others might send a deputy), and had the support of A/L SecGen Moussa and Egyptian FM Aboul Gheit. AbZ was not sure whether Iraqi FM Zebari was aware of this discussion.

Engage the Maghreb States

¶9. (S) Stating that Maghreb countries were "feeling isolated by the U.S. on Iraq," AbZ encouraged deeper engagement with them. He noted that all were present at the Damascus Arab League summit, possibly sending a message to the U.S. that "you are not engaging us." He recommended more outreach to the Maghreb on the issues of Lebanon and Palestine as well though cautioning that it might take more than one attempt to succeed. AbZ said Morocco was "dying to be included" in recent "GCC plus" meetings in Bahrain.

Questioning Leadership

¶10. (S) AbZ asked whether President Talibani's visits to Tehran suggested an affinity for that nation, to which Satterfield replied that Talibani likes the diplomatic spotlight, sees a potential "statesman" role in mediating between the U.S. and Iran, and realizes Iran's influence over certain practical issues that impact Iraq's Kurdish population. Iyad Allawi claims he plans to be in Baghdad more often, said AbZ, although he said Allawi was in Abu Dhabi at the time; Satterfield stressed that Allawi needed to be involved in political life in Baghdad to make a meaningful mark. Otherwise he would be "distancing himself" and his political base would continue to erode. AbZ said it was important for Maliki to feel some competition for the top job to prevent illusions of grandeur as the savior of Iraq. Satterfield described the evolution of Maliki's political confidence from a man who saw a rival around every corner to a confident commander (perhaps too confident). Maliki was more open to a collegial approach after his experience of going it alone in Basra, Satterfield said, and is listening more.

Press in Saudi Too

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¶11. (S) Wishing Satterfield good luck in convincing the Saudis to work with Maliki, AbZ said Maliki should take a proactive step such as performing Umrah in Mecca when King Abdullah is there. It would be difficult for the King to refuse a meeting, he insisted, recalling that "I've had my bad days" with a stubborn King Abdullah who "barely shook my hand" for two years after a minor misunderstanding. AbZ said recent meetings represented the first time in a long while that he (AbZ) felt FM Saud agreed there is progress in Iraq ("a different Iraq than a few months ago"). Basra appears to have been a turning point for Saud, suggested AbZ, who did not know whether the King might share a fresh perspective.

Consult Openly with Your Allies

¶12. (S) AbZ said frankly that many view U.S.-Iran talks with skepticism; "the Americans are doing it again," making a deal with the enemy without their allies in the room, is a common interpretation. AbZ recalled a lack of transparency on an Iran incentives package two years previously as an example of Gulf states being asked to support an initiative they were not informed about. How could they press Iran to support something they had not seen? It was "bizarre" that the UAE finally learned of the contents of the incentives package from Iran rather than from its U.S. or European partners.

¶13. (S) Stating that Iran needs to perceive that the U.S. genuinely engages and respects its allies in the region, AbZ said Iran should know that the U.S. is sharing the content of its talks with the region. "You have to tell them that, and they have to hear it from their neighbors." AbZ found it humiliating that he learned of the substance of the U.S.-Iran talks from FM Mottaki.

Don't Expect the UAE to Remain Open to Iraqis

¶14. (S) In conclusion, AbZ said it goes without saying that the UAE wants the U.S. to succeed in creating an Iraq "as prosperous as possible." ("Make no mistake, we want you to succeed.") AbZ did not want to dictate how Iraq should handle Iran, but hoped to see Iraq pursue "two-way" relations with its neighbors. He said Iraq was disappointed with the UAE for issuing fewer visas to Iraqis -- a decision made for the simple reason that the UAE cannot risk the presence of more Iraqis, whether they be "lunatic radicals" (Sunni) or committed to the Iranian cause (Shi'a). The UAE is home to many talented Iraqis, said AbZ, to the extent that some accuse the UAE and Jordan of "deliberately extracting Iraqi talent" to hurt the motherland (a claim apparently made by an Iraqi deputy health minister).

¶15. (C) AbZ thanked Ambassador Satterfield for his brief and for "trusting in this relationship." The UAE is devoted to nourishing relations further.

State Security Directorate (SSD): Tamping down Iran's influence

¶16. (S) Brigadier General Al-Shamsi commended our "joint efforts" to ease the situation in Iraq, noting that some of the more difficult challenges stemmed from Iraqi behavior. Facing each challenge is vital to regional stability, said Satterfield, adding that U.S. assessments of political evolution in Iraq leave us cautiously optimistic that long-standing mistrust can be overcome with the help of deeper engagement by moderate players in the region. A combination of Iran overplaying its hand, PM Maliki taking charge when faced with a deteriorating situation in Basra, and a credible performance by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) had opened the field to a more assertive GoI less inclined to lean toward Iran. Iran, for its part, needs to be forced to deal with the GoI directly rather than through violence-prone surrogate groups. The GoI is not likely to confront Iran openly, added Satterfield, but seeks to undermine Iran's confidence and stop its current duplicity. The Iraqi view of Iran is increasingly hostile, he concluded.

¶17. (S) The UAE and GCC should not allow Iran, among all of Iraq's close neighbors, to dominate the diplomatic arena. Nations need to see, and influence, developments first hand in Baghdad, said Satterfield; GCC states are needed there now more than ever. Maliki needs direct communication from the Gulf countries. Al-Shamsi asserted that the UAE leadership is willing to assist as much as possible, has engaged with both Sunni and Shi'a groups (in spite of some accusations of meddling in internal Iraqi affairs), and has been trying for a year to move the UAE Embassy into the International Zone -- but continues to wait for GoI follow-up on an appropriate location. Iran aims to divide Sunni and Shi'a, agreed al-Shamsi, and must be countered with deepened GoI-Sunni engagement. He cited those involved in the "Awakening" as particularly important Sunni interlocutors.

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Engaging the Awakening

¶18. (S) The U.S. delegation elaborated on USG and GoI efforts to engage Awakening elements and former resistance groups, with over 100,000 individuals now under contract with Coalition Forces and cooperating with the GoI. The Sons of Iraq work closely with the ISF, for example, and integrate many former resistance fighters into their ranks. The opportunity now exists for pushing these groups toward integration rather than keeping one foot in the resistance (a group of former senior military officers negotiating a resumption of pension payments with the GoI is a case in point of the improving potential for

cooperation). A "one-dimensional" Maliki is evolving into a more well rounded national figure, argued the U.S. team. The engagement of other Arab states with Iraqi groups should be coordinated transparently with the GoI, they added, to avoid GoI reliance on rumor and suspicion as to the motives of such contact. Al-Shamsi noted how Iraqi interlocutors, including National Security Advisor al-Rubaie, had proven unreliable conduits for information in the past. The UAEG had asked the GoI (presumably through its ambassador in Abu Dhabi) how it viewed ongoing UAE engagement with the Awakening movement; when the GoI did not reply, the UAEG decided to continue its engagement efforts in order to counter extremism. As a result, the UAEG maintains good relations with various groups in Iraq.

¶19. (S) In a brief discussion of outreach to tribes, including southern tribes and Shi'a groups, the delegations agreed that the GoI should be encouraged to keep doors open to dialogue. True extremists should be isolated while others might be co-opted into the political process, concluded Satterfield. Al-Shamsi cited the importance to Iran of having proxies in the region, acknowledging that Iran was no doubt more active in Iraq than moderate states in the region. It would be preferable if Iran faced a joint and organized front in Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen as well. Iran had shown that it can control much of the situation in Iraq, in spite of the U.S. presence, and regional states must together assess how to counter Iran's proxies in Iraq and elsewhere. Al-Shamsi said "enemies" in the region (Iran) work hard to build relations with Sunni and Shi'a extremists; it is important to build anti al-Qaeda support in Sunni areas through joint action, he asserted.

Playing as a team

¶20. (S) Asked in conclusion how the U.S. could be most helpful, al-Shamsi cited again the importance of "joint efforts." If al-Qaeda is not checked in Iraq (through an ongoing U.S. presence and working with the Awakening movement) "you will find al-Qaeda capable to hit everywhere." The UAEG is fully committed to supporting U.S. efforts, he asserted, to combat extremism in the region and build a better future. Al-Shamsi said State Security had no well-established channel with the GoI aside from liaison officers at the Iraqi Embassy. The UAE Embassy in Baghdad had been active and the UAEG is ready to move back, he added, in spite of less than ideal circumstances. He hoped the Awakening could be duplicated in some fashion in southern Iraq -- to keep fighters out of the militias.

¶21. (U) Ambassador Satterfield approved this message.

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